

## Etymologies of *vampire* with *pirъ* “a feast”

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**ABSTRACT** *An addendum to Kamil Stachowski and Olaf Stachowski’s “Possibly Oriental Elements in Slavonic Folklore. Upiór ~ wampir” (2017). Etymological propositions involving Old Slavonic pirъ “a feast” are discussed: one by Jan L. Perkowski from The Darkling: A Treatise on Slavic Vampirism (1989); three by Bruce A. McClelland from Slayers and Their Vampires: A Cultural History of Killing the Dead (2006); and one by Michael Dilts, from the remarks in his peer review of this paper.*

**KEYWORDS** *etymology; libations; naming conventions; phonetics; historical linguistics*

### ABBREVIATIONS

Blrs.	Belarusian	Gr.	Greek	Slav.	Slavonic
Bosn.	Bosnian	O-	Old	Slvk.	Slovak
Bulg.	Bulgarian	P-	Proto	Sw.	Swedish
Croat.	Croatian	Pol.	Polish	Syr.	Syriac
Cz.	Czech	Russ.	Russian	Ukr.	Ukrainian
E	east	Serb.	Serbian	W	west

### INTRODUCTION

Many etymologies have been put forward to explain Slav. *upiór* ~ *wampir* “vampire.” I discussed twenty-three of them in a paper co-written with Olaf Stachowski,<sup>1</sup> but did not include in it a distinct group of propositions which were unknown to us at the time of writing. Unlike the other etymologies examined, these interpret our word as a composition of two elements, the second of which is OSlav. *pirъ* “a feast”; the compound would be coined in the Balkans, around the tenth century ad. Therefore, this paper serves as an addendum to “*Upiór ~ wampir*,” and fits into it as follows: subsection “Jan L. Perkowski” would be subsection number 2.1.12, “Bruce A. McClelland” subsection 2.1.18 (after current 2.1.16), and “Michael Dilts” subsection 2.1.20 (after 2.1.17).

I would also like to use this opportunity to cite two cases, previously unknown to me, when our word was used as a given name.<sup>2</sup> N. M. Tupikov lists three such

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<sup>1</sup> Kamil Stachowski and Olaf Stachowski, “Possibly Oriental Elements in Slavonic Folklore. *Upiór ~ wampir*,” in *Essays in the History of Languages and Linguistics: Dedicated to Marek Stachowski on the Occasion of His 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. Michał Németh, Barbara Podolak, and Mateusz Urban (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2017), 643–93.

<sup>2</sup> Stachowski and Stachowski, “*Upiór ~ wampir*,” subsection 2.42.

examples:<sup>3</sup> the well-known priest Упиръ Лихый (Upir' Lihyj), a 1495 source mentioning a peasant by the name of Макаренко Упиръ (Makarnk" Upir'),<sup>4</sup> and a 1600 source mentioning an Ovruch peasant Клима Упиръ (Klim" Upir'). Since it is unlikely that *upirь* ~ *upirь* was intended to mean "vampire" in the well-known sense in either of those cases, they can probably be viewed as additional arguments to support Anders Sjöberg's explanation of the name of Упиръ Лихый (see "Bruce A. McClelland" below).<sup>5</sup>

## ETYMOLOGIES

Jan L. Perkowski

The gist of Jan L. Perkowski's idea is that our word is a composition of *Ban*, the borrowed name of a Manichaean god + OSlav. [?] *pirь* "a feast," which would then become through an unspecified semantic shift the name of an undead monster.<sup>6</sup> The entire development would take place in the Balkans starting in the ninth century<sup>7</sup> or in the fourteenth–fifteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

Perkowski prefaces his etymology with a lengthy exploration of the religious history of the Balkans in search of dualistic motifs on the one hand, and echoes of Bogomilism in the region's vampire lore on the other.<sup>9</sup> I understand that this is to justify the borrowing by Slavs of a Manichaean character and its name. I find the argumentation less than convincing but will not summarize it here because in my eyes this is in fact the least controversial aspect of his proposition, and likely beside the point anyway. Let it just be noted that the assumption that our word came into being in the Balkans in the early High Middle Ages, or all the more in Late Middle Ages, and then spread throughout the Slavonic world, raises at least two problems. They are presented in subsection "Bruce A. McClelland", together with the rest of the discussion of the historical aspect.

Here, let us first discuss the foreign element, *Ban*. According to the Manichaean tradition, the world was constructed in the Second Creation, through the mediation of "the Great Builder," Syr. *bān rabbā*.<sup>10</sup> I am not sure why Perkowski introduces

<sup>3</sup> N. M. Tupikov, *Словарь древнерусских личных собственных имен* (St. Petersburg: Tip. I.N. Skorokhodova, 1903; Moscow: Directmedia, 2013), s.v. упирь, <https://books.google.pl/books?id=MIjsBQAAQBAJ>.

<sup>4</sup> "Makarenko" in Felix J. Oinas, "Heretics as Vampires and Demons in Russia," *Slavic and East European Journal* 22, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 436, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/307666>, where he is additionally described as residing in Novgorod.

<sup>5</sup> Sjöberg, "Pop Upir' Lichoј and the Swedish Rune-Carver Ofeigr Upir," *Scando-Slavica* 28, no. 1 (1982): 109–24.

<sup>6</sup> Jan L. Perkowski, *The Darkling: A Treatise of Slavic Vampirism* (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1989), 33–34.

<sup>7</sup> Perkowski, *Darkling*, 32.

<sup>8</sup> Perkowski, *Darkling*, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Perkowski, *Darkling*, 24–34.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Tardieu, *Manichaeism*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Urbana: University of Illinois

this character only through his other function which is to prepare a tomb for Darkness to be imprisoned in at the end of the world.<sup>11</sup> As a possible link between the Middle East and the Balkans, Perkowski adduces a tenth century Greek record of a certain heretic by the name of βαανης. He mentions that "The Armenian form of this name is *Vahan*, which means 'shield' in modern Armenian,"<sup>12</sup> but does not explore the possibility that βαανης might be nothing more than a Greek rendering of an Armenian given name. He even references Nina G. Garsoïan,<sup>13</sup> who does in fact state very clearly that this is exactly what βαανης is.<sup>14</sup>

Perkowski derives Slav. *\*van-* in *wampir* &c. from Gr. βαανης,<sup>15</sup> so at this point we must either put aside the connection to Ban, or βαανης as the intermediary between Syriac and Slavonic. In the former case, it is entirely unclear to me why the word would have been borrowed or in what meaning, so let us pursue the other possibility. I must, however, begin by noting that it is not at all likely. Ban is a fairly peripheral character in Manichaeism itself; for knowledge about him to penetrate outside of the relatively narrow community of Bogomils, and for his name to be apparently only preserved in just a single word, and one that is not in any way related to religion but is the name of a widely-known monster, would be an exceptional coincidence. Notwithstanding, according to Perkowski, *\*vanŭpirŭ* meant "Van's festival."<sup>16</sup> He does not precise the actual language but judging by *pirŭ*, I assume he has Old Slavonic in mind. In this case, I am guessing that *\*vanŭ* – or, in fact, *\*vańb* – would be the adjective from *\*vanŭ*, similar to *konstantinŭ* < *\*konstantin-jb* < *konstantinŭ* < Gr. Κωνσταντῖνος.<sup>17</sup>

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Press, 2008), 77–79, <https://books.google.pl/books?id=e9wk7DQRoPoC>; see also Paul Van Lindt, *The Names of Manichaean Mythological Figures: A Comparative Study on Terminology in the Coptic Sources* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 78–80, [https://books.google.pl/books?id=CHL4ih89v\\_QC](https://books.google.pl/books?id=CHL4ih89v_QC); and Werner Sundermann, "Cosmogony and Cosmology III. In Manicheism," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. 6, fasc. 3 (Columbia University, 1993), article published December 15, 1993; last updated October 31, 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cosmogony-iii>.

<sup>11</sup> Perkowski, *Darkling*, 33. Regarding this, see also Byard Bennett, "Globus horribilis: The Role of the Bolos in Manichaean Eschatology and Its Polemical Transformation in Augustine's Anti-Manichaean Writings," in 'In Search of Truth': *Augustine, Manichaeism and Other Gnosticism; Studies for Johannes van Oort at Sixty*, eds. Jacob Albert van den Berg, Annemaré Kotzé, Tobias Nicklas, and Madeleine Scopello (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 429, <https://books.google.com.pl/books?id=qeYE234vlgwC&dq>.

<sup>12</sup> Perkowski, *Darkling*, 33.

<sup>13</sup> Specifically, Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy: A Study of the Origin and Development of Paulicianism in Armenia and the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire* (The Hague: De Gruyter, 1967), 119–21, <https://books.google.pl/books?id=sk9Q-A0zwq0C>.

<sup>14</sup> Garsoïan, *Paulician Heresy*, 145, 183.

<sup>15</sup> Perkowski, *Darkling*, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Perkowski, *Darkling*, 33.

<sup>17</sup> Jussi Halla-aho, *Problems of Proto-Slavic Historical Nominal Morphology: On the Basis of Old Church Slavic* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2006), 275, but see also pp. 97, 273, regarding the palatalization.

The phonetics Perkowski explains by “the expected phonological development \*vam → ǫ → u” on the way from South through East to West Slavonic.<sup>18</sup> He does not reference any other source that would also expect such a development. Among Slavacists, the consensus is that PSlav. \*ǫ > ESlav. *u-*, SSlav. *a, ə, o, u*, and WSlav. *o, u*; in some languages this coincided with a not entirely regular prothesis of *v-*. In particular, in Bulgarian, PSlav. *ǫ-* generally > *vǣ-*, while in the east > *vu-* in Belarusian and Ukrainian, and > *u-* in Russian.<sup>19</sup> This is why the great majority of etymologists favour an original \*ǫ- in our word,<sup>20</sup> and also why OSlav. \**vańbpirb* has effectively no way of accounting for northern Slavonic data.

The semantic side raises at least three questions. It is wholly unclear to me how the Manichaean “Great Builder” relates to the “revenant” from Slavonic folklore, and how “revelry” or “drinking bout” fit into this scheme. In fact, it is even unclear to me why Perkowski translates *pirb* in this way<sup>21</sup> when the word appears to have had an overall more moderate meaning of “hostina; Gastmahl, Gelage; δοχή, ἄριστον, πότος, συμπόσιον; convivium.”<sup>22</sup> I am likewise at a loss to imagine a realistic series of semantic changes that would lead from “Van’s festival” to the name of a creature, dead, alive, or in between.

In conclusion, Perkowski’s proposition must be rejected for morphological, phonetic, semantic, and probably also historical/cultural reasons.

#### Bruce A. McClelland

Bruce A. McClelland offers as many as three etymologies, all similar to each other, and also to Perkowski’s idea.<sup>23</sup> But to understand them, the reader requires some background which is scattered throughout the book,<sup>24</sup> so let us begin by briefly summarizing it here.

The overall impression from McClelland’s book is that the supposed first attestation of our word, in a signature in a 1047 Glagolitic manuscript of the *Book of*

<sup>18</sup> Perkowski, *Darkling*, 33–34.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Ronald Sussex and Paul Cubberley, *The Slavic Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 115, 125. Strictly speaking, Perkowski does not specify which language had which sound so, giving him the benefit of doubt, one could complete his formula in the most favourable way as “PBaltoSlav. \*vam > PSlav. \*ǫ > Bosn., Croat., Serb. *u*” (cf. e.g. Matej Šekli, *Od praindoevropščine do praslovanščine*, vol. 1 of *Primerjalno glasoslovje slovanskih jezikov* [Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2014], 250, 329; and Sussex and Cubberley, *Slavic Languages*, 116). But even this interpretation cannot account for the loss of \*v- and, in addition, requires that Ban be borrowed at the Proto-Balto-Slavic stage which very significantly weakens the hypothesis.

<sup>20</sup> Stachowski and Stachowski, “*Upiór ~ wampir*,” 666–7.

<sup>21</sup> Perkowski, *Darkling*, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Josef Kurz, ed., *Slovník jazyka staroslověnského: Lexicon linguae palaeoslovenicae*, vol. 3 (Prague: Nakladatelství Československé Akademie Věd, 1982), s.v. *nupb*.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce A. McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires: A Cultural History of Killing the Dead* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 187–91.

<sup>24</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, “etymology,” listed in the index, 259.

*the Prophets*, was seminal for him.<sup>25</sup> The inscription reads *попъ оупиръ лихый* (pop' oupir' lihyj), and it is indeed not immediately clear why a priest should refer to himself as "evil vampire", as the traditional translation suggests. McClelland's explanation is that originally the word had no connection with the supernatural at all; it denoted a group of people, impossible now to precisely identify, who had nothing unusual about them other than their non-Christian beliefs and/or ritual practices.

The argument for this claim is based on two premises: 1) In mediaeval Europe, Christianity had to fight for its position and unity. At first, it would rebrand and incorporate the local pagan beliefs and rituals, but as its strength grew, its attitude quickly turned into condemnation and open hostility; when pagans disappeared, heretics took their place and were persecuted by the Church with equal vigour; 2) McClelland's view of the vampire in a mediaeval society is purely functional: "The vampire serves as etiological factor behind visible events requiring an explanation, and ritualized group aggression against the vampire serves to alleviate collective anxiety by making of the vampirized corpse a scapegoat."<sup>26</sup>

Now, "taking a cue from the evident relationship between vampires and such persecuted groups as witches and magicians,"<sup>27</sup> McClelland asserts that "early in the history of the word *vampir*, its meaning was tied closely to heresy,"<sup>28</sup> "the scapegoat function of the vampire is traceable to Christian hostility toward pagans before heretics"<sup>29</sup> and that the "link between the vampire and heresy is a later phenomenon, resulting from an extension of the semantic range of the word *vampir*, provoked by the displacement of pagans by heretics as targets of Christian polemic."<sup>30</sup> McClelland stresses one particular reason for this opposition from the Church<sup>31</sup>: ritual sacrifices, or at least a specific kind of sacrifices, followed by feasts during which "polluted pagans" were accused of "foul services," debauchery, music and dancing.<sup>32</sup>

In short, McClelland's argument, as I understand it, is this: 1) the Church persecuted pagans and heretics for, among other things, sacrifices and feasts; 2) vampires [men or monsters?] were associated with paganism/heresy; 3) vampires [monsters] served as scapegoats, a link that is "traceable to Christian hostility toward pagans before heretics"<sup>33</sup>—therefore, *vampir* was originally [before point 2?] a term for (a particular group of) pagans or heretics, and its supernatural meaning only evolved later. "Later" must mean here after the tenth or eleventh century,<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See especially McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 187–91.

<sup>26</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 75.

<sup>27</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 75.

<sup>28</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 76.

<sup>29</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 77.

<sup>30</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 77.

<sup>31</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 36–41.

<sup>32</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 41.

<sup>33</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 77.

<sup>34</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 35–37.

and before the fifteenth century when vampires were listed together with *bereginas*, *vilas*, *Mokoš*, *Perun* and other pagan characters in a manuscript of the *Oration of Saint Gregory*.<sup>35</sup> I appreciate that McClelland's reasoning might have actually been different because the one outlined above shows evident rifts in the logical continuity. It is unfortunate that I failed to extract a more coherent understanding from *Slayers and Their Vampires*, but luckily not critical for the remarks presented below.

Let us now look into McClelland's propositions.

It is impossible to disagree with the claim that the Church was hostile toward any idea and any people who threatened its position or unity. It is also beyond doubt that pagans and heretics were not only rhetorically condemned and accused of wickedness, but also physically persecuted and, surely, sometimes blamed for various calamities, too. Likewise, I cannot debate the assertion that, especially among the less theologically inclined populace, the various heretic groups could easily be conflated with pagans and other people to just "foreigners."

Next, the very functional, pragmatic view of the vampire's place in the belief system of a mediaeval society is no doubt true: in the sense that the creature was blamed for certain specific tragedies.<sup>36</sup> There is, however, no evidence to suggest that it was viewed as a vehicle for the sins of the local folk, as the usual anthropological understanding of the term *scapegoat* would suggest—or at least as an individual who can be conveniently blamed for somebody else's wrongdoing, as the more colloquial interpretation of the term would have it. McClelland's is a modern, detached, analytical insight, but also one that is very unlikely to have been widespread among mediaeval peasants—not least because it does seem that, had they shared his perspective, it would have rather drained the sense of purpose from any aggression they might have wanted to exercise against what they would have seen as nothing more than a corpse. No, they must have honestly believed in the reality of vampires and thought it reasonable to blame them for the deaths of members of their community.<sup>37</sup> As, indeed, they would treat any other of the many

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Dilts points out in his peer review of this paper that the dating of *Oration* to the fifteenth century is in fact debatable: "the date of this item is disputed, with some scholars (e.g. Boris Rybakov) dating it to the beginning of the 12th [c]entury" (Michael Dilts, email message to Anthony Hogg, July 30, 2018; repr. "Re: Vampire Etymology Article," *Journal of Vampire Studies* 1, no. 1 [2020]: 130. Subsequent citations refer to *JVS* version), a fact which McClelland is not unaware of (*Slayers and Their Vampires*, 39, 202) but does not pursue in great depth. It may be that the time frame should be specified as tenth–twelfth rather than tenth–fifteenth century, but it is not entirely clear to me how this uncertainty impacts McClelland's proposition as a whole.

<sup>36</sup> Jerzy Strzelczyk, *Mity, podania i wierzenia dawnych Słowian* (Poznań: Rebis, 1998), s.v. *upiór*.

<sup>37</sup> Such beliefs have in fact persisted well into modernity. For example, in nineteenth century New England, it was not unusual to blame victims of tuberculosis for spreading the illness after death. Michael E. Bell, "Vampires and Death in New England, 1784 to 1892," *Anthropology and Humanism* 31, no. 2 (December 2006: 124–40, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ahu.2006.31.2.124>; see especially pp. 124–8. At the fringes of Western rationalism, one can witness

supernatural creatures that populated the Slavonic folklore—a circumstance which McClelland appears to entirely overlook in his focus on vampires alone.

The early mediaeval association between vampires and paganism or heresy is less evident to me than it is to McClelland. Vampires were part of a worldview similar, in many ways, to what ghosts are to many people today. The belief is not a religious one, it is cultural. The clergy may have associated them with the pre-Christian culture and, by induction, with paganism, but I am only aware of this happening at a later date. McClelland himself only cites a fifteenth century source to this effect.<sup>38</sup> To posit that this change of attitude occurred (considerably) earlier would require much stronger evidence than I was able to find in McClelland's book, and the same reservation applies to his claim that the function of the vampire as a scapegoat is "traceable to Christian hostility toward pagans before heretics."<sup>39</sup>

But even if we suspend doubt and accept these premises, the conclusion which McClelland draws from them is going to be difficult to defend. Effectively, he is asking the reader to believe that, because a group of people was persecuted, their name took on the meaning of "an undead monster"—because both could be blamed for various calamities that befell the local community. McClelland does not explore in detail exactly what calamities heretics were blamed for, and whether the list included deaths of the kin of a recently deceased person, as this appears to have been the primary field of interest of vampires. Similarly, he does not dwell on any of the multitude of mythical creatures of the Slavonic folklore which were likewise regularly blamed for one tragedy or another, and reasons as if vampires were the only potential scapegoats on offer. I can only guess that the semantic evolution he had in mind is this: \*(a particular group of) pagans\* > \*people blamed for various things\* > \*a scapegoat\* > "vampire (functioning as a scapegoat)."

If my guess is correct, then we must also assume that the belief in a corpse rising from the grave actually predated the last one in this chain of semantic changes. The opposite would be only possible if whoever initiated this change had the same analytical insight and utilitarian view of the vampire as McClelland does several hundred years later. If that is the case, then two further reservations need to be voiced.

Firstly, McClelland seems to imply, though he does not say so directly, that our series of semantic changes took place in Bulgaria. The country was baptized in 864, and we must allow some time for the new religion to actually take root among the populace before such semantic shifts can occur. McClelland estimates that could have happened in the tenth or eleventh century.<sup>40</sup> We must also allow some time for the new name to spread from Bulgaria across the Slavonic world, which could not have been a rapid process in early High Middle Ages. It is quite surprising

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them even today in the form of Koryak "vampires." Alexander D. King, "Soul Suckers: Vampiric Shamans in Northern Kamchatka, Russia," *Anthropology of Consciousness* 10, no. 4 (December 1999): 57–68.

<sup>38</sup> But see note 35 above.

<sup>39</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 77.

<sup>40</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 42.

then, that supposed anti-vampiric burials appear in Poland as early as the tenth century. It is, in fact, possible that the existing archaeological interpretation of those burials is inaccurate,<sup>41</sup> but it is not extremely likely. Secondly, one may find it difficult to believe that a new name for an already existing creature should spread not only so rapidly and so far, throughout the entire Slavonic world, but also so deeply as to seemingly erase completely any trace of whatever name vampires bore previously. Especially if the epicentre of this change was Bulgaria, an Orthodox country, and Western Slavonic states followed the Roman rite and therefore were not so much under its influence at all.

As far as semantics is concerned, however, there may be another possibility. McClelland mentions Felix Oinas' 1978 article, "Heretics as Vampires and Demons in Russia,"<sup>42</sup> which discusses the use of the word *епетук* in Russia's Siberia effectively in the meaning of "vampire." Oinas suggests the change took place in the sixteenth–seventeenth century<sup>43</sup> but does not thoroughly discuss semantics. I imagine the following sequence: "heretic" > \*"heretic, pagan, any non-Orthodox Christian" > \*"+ witch, sorcerer, &c." > "[a sorcerer who became a] vampire," where the last link was informed by the folklore of Tatars and other neighbouring Turkic peoples.<sup>44</sup> However, for such an explanation to be acceptable, it requires the presence of a strong and early association between sorcerers and vampires which, to the best of my knowledge, is lacking from Bulgarian folklore. It is present in Chuvash<sup>45</sup> but I do not know if it is original there, and therefore had had an opportunity to penetrate to Bulgarian mythology, or a later innovation or a borrowing from Tatar, and therefore did not.<sup>46</sup>

Lastly, regarding the 1047 attestation as *нонѣ оупирѣ лихый*. I certainly agree with McClelland that it would be strange if a priest, or anyone for that matter, referred to themselves as "evil vampire." But unlike McClelland,<sup>47</sup> I fail to see how it would be less strange if a priest signed himself—be it in a humble, self-deprecating way, as McClelland suggests—as "weak heretic" (*weak* as in "susceptible to evil"). I believe that a far more plausible explanation is the one

<sup>41</sup> Leszek Gardela and Paweł Duma, "Untimely Death: Atypical Burials of Children in Early and Late Medieval Poland," *World Archaeology* 45, no. 2 (2013): 314–32, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2013.799040>; Leszek Gardela and Kamil Kajkowski, "Vampires, Criminals or Slaves? Reinterpreting 'Deviant Burials' in Early Medieval Poland," *World Archaeology* 45, no. 5 (2013): 780–96, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2013.849853>; Stachowski and Stachowski, "Upiór ~ wampir," 677.

<sup>42</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 187, 230n3.

<sup>43</sup> Oinas, "Heretics as Vampires," 437.

<sup>44</sup> Stachowski and Stachowski, "Upiór ~ wampir," 653, 668–9.

<sup>45</sup> Stachowski and Stachowski, "Upiór ~ wampir," 669–70.

<sup>46</sup> Incidentally, a form of such an association is also present in the entirely contemporary, "transhuman" vampire (see Wojciech Kosior, "Kompleks upiora-wampira i jego realizacja we współczesności. Duchowość wampiryczna," *Ex Nihilo: Periodyk Młodych Religioznawców* 1 [2009]: 64–81) but I doubt that the two are linked by anything more specific than the general human fascination with the extraordinary.

<sup>47</sup> McClelland. *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 187–91.



proposed by Sjöberg where our priest is identified with the Upplandic rune-carver Upir Ofeigr, and his name interpreted as a combination of a Slavonic rendering of OSw. *upir* ~ ... "screamer, shouter," with a translation of *ofeigr* "bold, daring."<sup>48</sup> In fact, it is not even necessary that the priest and the rune-carver be the same person; the priest might have simply been the first recorded Slav to bear this particular borrowed Scandinavian name. This idea is additionally strengthened by fifteenth and seventeenth century attestations of eastern Slavonic peasants *Макарнкъ Упиъ* and *Климъ Упиръ*.<sup>49</sup>

To sum up, the entire premise of McClelland's proposition is at best debatable. The etymologies are not.

McClelland offers three propositions, without specifying the language, the time, or the geography.<sup>50</sup> He states that the morphemes in his reconstructions "correspond to O[ld] C[hurch] S[lavonic]" words, and refers to Old Slavonic word-formative patterns;<sup>51</sup> based on previous mentions in the book,<sup>52</sup> I am guessing they should be dated to around tenth–eleventh century; and the overall impression from the book is that he sees our word as originating from Bulgaria.<sup>53</sup>

1. *vamъ* "you dat.pl" + *pirъ* "a feast, libation" > *vampirъ* "a feast (or libation" for/to you [pl.]." The word would designate a group "known to offer libations to multiple deities (since the Orthodox Christian God was always addressed, in prayers, by the singular, **ты**)."<sup>54</sup> McClelland himself voices doubts about this etymology, in particular whether "such an ethnonymic construction follows a productive pattern in Old Slavic,"<sup>55</sup> whether ethnonyms could contain personal pronouns in them and, touchingly, whether the word order is natural. I could not agree more with McClelland's reservations.
2. *въ* "into" + *pirъ* "a feast, libation" > *въpirъ*, *въmpirъ* "into the feast." In fact, McClelland translates *въ* as "in, into" and the entire compound as "in (or into) the feast,"<sup>56</sup> but since he consistently proposes *pirъ*, i.e. nom. or acc., the meaning could not have been static because that would have required the loc. form *pirě* or *piru*.<sup>57</sup> The word would designate "someone who participated in feasting."<sup>58</sup> McClelland admits that this idea necessitates the

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<sup>48</sup> See Stachowski and Stachowski, "*Upiór ~ wampir*," 675–6.

<sup>49</sup> See introduction.

<sup>50</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 187–91.

<sup>51</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 189.

<sup>52</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 42.

<sup>53</sup> See in particular McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 190.

<sup>54</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 189.

<sup>55</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 189.

<sup>56</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 190.

<sup>57</sup> Kurz, *Slovník jazyka staroslověnského*, s.v. *nupъ*.

<sup>58</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 190.

assumption of a later insertion of *m* between the two words, but this aspect is actually not impossible.<sup>59</sup> The weak side is the change from “into the feast” > “someone who participated in feasting,” a rather unusual development which McClelland sadly does not support with any parallel examples, and for which I too am unable to adduce or indeed conceive of any. In this context, I find it ironic that McClelland ends the paragraph with a criticism of J. B. Rudnyćkyj’s etymology, saying that “It is harder to justify the notion that **пиръ** was ever some sort of *nomen agentis*, such that *въ pir* [sic, no -v] would mean ‘he who drinks in.’”<sup>60</sup> Lastly, I am not certain about the use of *въ* with *pirъ* in general because the only relevant attestation I could find actually employs *къ*: *инъ къ богатого пирови приишълъ бы* “ad ... convivium.”<sup>61</sup>

3. *вънъ* “outside” + *pirъ* “a feast, libation [offered at an initiation]” > *въmpirъ* “outside the feast.” The word would designate someone who did not participate in the libation offered at an initiation, hence “uninitiated,” “outside the circle of initiates.”<sup>62</sup> According to McClelland, this idea is especially attractive as it would allow us to translate the confusing 1047 attestation of *оупиръ лихый* as “an estranged uninitiate,” a humble, self-deprecating signature of someone who “had lapsed from Christianity by participating in pagan Slavic feasting.”<sup>63</sup> But it would not. If he had participated in such feasting, he would no longer have been an uninitiate—unless the meaning of our word would have already shifted to “pagan” or “heretic” by 1047, but this is unlikely for reasons mentioned above, and anyway even in such case he could only be “an estranged pagan or heretic,” not “an uninitiate.” Also, we must not forget that the author was in fact a priest, a circumstance which does not quite fit into McClelland’s explanation at all. The 1982 proposition by Sjöberg mentioned above is considerably more plausible. Be that as it may, the main difficulty with this idea is the shift from “outside the libation” to “someone outside the libation.” McClelland does not explain how such a change could have occurred and does not offer any parallel examples, and neither can I. Lastly, OSlav. *вънъ* stands with loc. so the expected, and indeed attested, form is in fact *pirě* or *piru* rather than *pirъ*.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to the reservations listed above, it needs to be noted that none of the forms proposed by McClelland can be directly connected to northern Slavonic

<sup>59</sup> Stachowski and Stachowski, “*Upiór ~ wampir*,” 680–82.

<sup>60</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 190.

<sup>61</sup> Kurz, *Slovník jazyka staroslověnského*, s.v. *пиръ*.

<sup>62</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 190.

<sup>63</sup> McClelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires*, 191.

<sup>64</sup> Kurz, *Slovník jazyka staroslověnského*, s.v. *пиръ*.

shapes with *u-*: Blrs. *úpir*, *úpiř*, Cz. and Slvk. *upír*, Pol. *upiór*, Russ. and Ukr. *upýr*, etc. All three scenarios entail either some rather unusual phonetic adaptations during the word's journey north from Bulgaria, or that the two groups of words (southern *vam-* and northern *u-*) are not related which is quite unlikely in light of their close semantic and phonetic similarity.

To sum up, McClelland assumes that the word *vampir* originally referred to people—pagans or heretics but perfectly human—and only later, sometime between the tenth and fifteenth centuries, its meaning shifted towards the supernatural. This assumption is maybe not entirely impossible to defend, if considerably stronger arguments can be found. He proposes three etymologies within this scheme. Those, however, must be rejected for morphological, phonetic, semantic, and probably also historical/cultural reasons.

#### *Michael Dilts*

In his review of this paper, Michael Dilts suggested another way in which *upiór* ~ *wampir* could be linked with *pirŮ*. At this stage, it is more a bundle of facts than a fully formed proposition. In short, he speculates that originally "the *upiri* [. . .] were spirits of the ancestors who frequented the gravesites where their remains were laid to rest, and libations kept them satisfied so that they did not harass the living."<sup>65</sup> The word for "libation," *pirŮ*, would be thus connected with the creatures themselves in a similar way as has happened in Christianity "in which Christ is the sacrificed 'lamb of god' who identifies his body with the offered bread and his blood with the wine drunk by the celebrant,"<sup>66</sup> or in Germanic languages where "a convincing etymology of the word for 'god' [...] derives it from the Proto-Indo-European root *\*gheu-* 'to pour, to libate'."<sup>67</sup> In the initial *u-*, Dilts sees the same verbal prefix as is attested in ORuss. *oynumu* *ca* "to become inebriated, to get drunk." He offers several more parallels for the ethnographic side of his idea which I will omit here for brevity, and because it is primarily the linguistic side that raises my reservations.

It is easy to see why Dilts made a connection between the facts he adduces, for they do appear to outline a reasonable narrative. The details, however, do not all fall into place. I understand he would propose OSlav. *upiti se* "to become inebriated" → *\*upirŮ* "libation" (similarly to *\*oběsti* > *\*obědŮ*) which would then transform into "one who 'gets drunk' from the libation" or "one [. . .] offered libations by the living," which in fact may be the same meaning. But such a shift is problematic. As was mentioned in subsection "Bruce A. McClelland," I am not aware of an Old Slavonic mechanism that would allow a deverbal noun of this kind to take on the meaning of a person. The Germanic parallel in *god* is only typological, and thus unlikely to convince etymologists on its own.

Dilts does not specify the time or place, but if the tradition from which he

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<sup>65</sup> Dilts, "Re: Vampire Etymology Article," 131.

<sup>66</sup> Dilts, "Re: Vampire Etymology Article," 130.

<sup>67</sup> Dilts, "Re: Vampire Etymology Article," 130–1.

would derive the vampire is Indo-European then I imagine it would be sensible to assume a Proto Slavonic provenance for our word. This raises phonetic problems. \**u-* can of course explain modern *u-* in *upiór* etc. but it cannot account for *vam-* in *wampir*-like forms. As discussed previously in my paper, *-m-* may be a later addition,<sup>68</sup> but *v-* cannot be ascribed to prothesis mentioned in subsection “Jan L. Perkowski” above or any other process that I am aware of, and neither can the quality of the vowel. To explain all three simultaneously would require a very strong set of arguments. In this situation, it would be perhaps easier to posit that *upiór* and *wampir* are not related after all, but such a claim would also demand a rather compelling counterproposition.

While the ethnographic and historical/cultural side of Dilts’ idea is not without appeal, morphology and phonetics appear to me to be the main weak points which must be addressed before a fully formed etymological proposition can be put forward.

## CONCLUSION

The paper examines a group of etymologies of Slav. *upiór* ~ *wampir* “vampire” which deconstruct the word into a composition with OSlav. (?) *pirъ* “a feast.”

One was proposed by Jan L. Perkowski. In it, the initial element is \**vanъ* “Ban,” i.e. an entity borrowed from the Manichaean tradition where it is known as “the Great Builder,” responsible for the creation of the world and the construction of the tomb in which to imprison Darkness. The following three etymologies were put forward by Bruce A. McClelland. These assume that the first element was either *vamъ* “to you” which would result in a compound meaning “a feast for you,” or *vъ* “into” yielding “into the feast,” or alternately *vъnъ* “outside” which would produce “outside the feast.” All four postulate that the compound was created in the Balkans around the tenth century (Perkowski also mentions fourteenth–fifteenth century at one point) and spread from there throughout the Slavonic world. The last proposition was suggested by Michael Dilts. It deconstructs our word into the verbal prefix *u-*, as in *oynumu* *ca* “to become inebriated”, + *pirъ* “libation.”

The historical and cultural side of Perkowski and McClelland’s ideas raises some reservations. Morphology is problematic in all the etymologies discussed here, primarily because it is not clear how *pirъ* “feast” could turn into the name of a person or monster without the help of any suffix at all. The postulated phonetic shapes will be also quite difficult to defend as they have no way of accounting for northern forms with *u-* or, conversely, for southern shapes with *vam-*. Lastly, the proposed semantic development must be considered rather exceptional and as such it will require far stronger argumentation than has been so far presented.

The idea of employing *pirъ* in our etymology is certainly unconventional and thus interesting. It is therefore with regret that I must judge it highly improbable for reasons outlined above—and then several more, as discussed in the respective

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<sup>68</sup> Stachowski and Stachowski, “*Upiór* ~ *wampir*,” 680–82.

subsections—and uphold my support either for the Turkic provenance or maybe for native \**qpirь* “unrotten.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Stachowski and Stachowski, “Upiór ~ wampir,” 670–2, 664.

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